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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Texas on Alert for Local Zika, DSHS Urges Precautions

Kerrville, Texas (August 10, 2016) – With local Zika cases detected in Florida, and increased travel to Brazil for the Summer Olympics, Texas is on high alert for local Zika transmission by mosquito bites and is urging everyone to strictly follow precautions.

“It’s the perfect mix – local transmission in Florida, travel to Brazil, and we’re at the height of mosquito season in Texas,” said Dr. John Hellerstedt, Texas Department of State Health Services commissioner. “Local transmission here is likely at some point. The good news is that Texas is ready.”

The Texas response plan is already in effect. Texas has reported 93 cases of Zika virus disease, all related to travel abroad to areas with active Zika transmission. No local transmission through mosquito bite has been detected yet in Texas. State efforts have been underway since January to delay and minimize the impact of Zika on Texas.

“If Texas has local transmission, we’ll quickly announce it and describe the area of potential risk for Texans,” Dr. Hellerstedt said. “We’re working in lockstep with our local and federal partners to ensure a strong Texas response.”

The Texas Department of State Health Services is spending more than \$6 million in state and federal funds on disease surveillance, expanded lab testing capabilities, public education and awareness, Zika prevention kits and other efforts to build a strong infrastructure to help protect Texans from Zika.

Texas Medicaid also announced Wednesday it will cover the cost of mosquito repellent for eligible women who are between the ages of 10 and 45 or pregnant.

The Department of State Health Services has identified and exercised eight state public health Zika Response Teams that are ready to deploy if local transmission is detected in Texas. These regional teams will be able to assist local entities with investigating possible cases, evaluating environments for mosquito activity, providing door-to-door education and other response efforts.

“We’re doing everything we can, and people have the power to protect themselves,” Dr. Hellerstedt said. “Insect repellent and information are our best defense.”

While local transmission in Texas remains likely at some point, public health officials do not expect widespread transmission across large geographic areas of the state. Small pockets of cases are more likely. This assessment is based on the state’s past experience with dengue, a similar virus spread by the same mosquitoes, and on the prevalent use of window screens, air conditioning, insect repellent and other mosquito control efforts in Texas.

The Department of State Health Services has approved more than 1,200 human specimens for Zika virus testing by the DSHS laboratory and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Other labs across the state also now have the ability to test for Zika. In late July, DSHS added the more complex serologic testing for human specimens to detect Zika infection in people who may not have had symptoms. Texas also has the capability to test

mosquito specimens for Zika as warranted for identified high-risk areas, though the best indicator of Zika prevalence is human case detection.

Zika poses a serious threat to unborn children, and protecting pregnant women is a central concern. Texas has reported 42 individuals into the CDC's Zika Pregnancy Registry. That number includes three pregnant women who are confirmed Zika cases. It also includes pregnant women and any newborns who have laboratory evidence of Zika infection but don't qualify as Zika cases because they have had no symptoms or because the infection couldn't specifically be identified as Zika virus.

Texas has confirmed that an infant who recently died in Harris County had microcephaly linked to the Zika virus. The baby passed away shortly after birth and is the first Zika-related death reported in Texas.

During her pregnancy, the mother was in Latin America, where she was infected, and the baby acquired the infection in the womb. Recent test results confirmed the baby's condition and link to Zika. The mother and baby are classified as travel-related cases, and there is no additional associated risk in Texas.

Last month Texas reported the state's first case of microcephaly linked to Zika, also a Harris County infant.

"Zika's impact on unborn babies can be tragic, and our hearts are with this family," said Dr. John Hellerstedt, Texas Department of State Health Services commissioner. "Our central mission from the beginning has been to do everything we can to protect unborn babies from the devastating effects of Zika."

Texas has reported 97 cases of Zika virus disease, including the two infants with microcephaly from Harris County. All Texas cases are related to travel abroad to areas with

active Zika transmission. There have been no reported cases of Zika virus disease transmitted by mosquitoes in Texas, but Texas is on alert for the possibility local transmission.

With its link to microcephaly, Zika poses a serious threat to unborn children. DSHS is tracking the number of pregnant women with Zika in the state, working with providers and reporting weekly data to the national Zika pregnancy registry. DSHS is studying past microcephaly data to understand the prevalence and patterns of this condition in Texas.

Texas provides data to the Zika Pregnancy Registry weekly. With local transmission in Florida and mosquito season in full force in Texas, state health officials urge everyone to follow precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites:

- Apply EPA-approved insect repellent.
- Wear pants and long-sleeve shirts that cover exposed skin. In warmer weather, wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing that covers exposed skin.
- Use screens or close windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out of your home.
- Remove standing water in and around the home. This includes water in cans, toys, tires, plant saucers, and any container that can hold water.
- Cover trash cans or containers where water can collect.

To avoid infecting local mosquitoes, people who travel to areas with active Zika transmission should apply insect repellent every time they go outside for at least three weeks after they return to Texas – and longer if they develop an illness that could be Zika. For more information about the Zika Virus in Texas, visit www.TexasZika.org.

More Zika related resources are also available at the below:

- [**Zika Precautions for Women \(ENTO-053\)**](#) is a new publication outlining the most important steps women can take to protect themselves and their unborn children from Zika. Protecting women is the top priority for public health agencies this summer.
- [**What Texans Need to Know About Zika Virus \(ENTO-052\)**](#) General information about Zika, what causes it, whether you should be worried, and how to stop it. ([**Spanish Version**](#))

- [**Mosquitoes and the Diseases they Transmit \(ENTO-040\)**](#) Provides an overview of all important disease carrying mosquitoes in Texas. Revised in 2016. ([**Spanish Version**](#))
- [**Buzz Off \(ENTO-055\)**](#) A short reminder of the 4-Ds, the four ways to avoid mosquito bites. A quick safety reminder for yourself, friends and family.
- [**Do-it-yourself Backyard Mosquito Control \(ENTO-054\)**](#) An overview of all the mosquito control options available to you as a consumer. Advantages and disadvantages—what we know and don't know about the many products out there. (Spoiler alert: don't buy bug zappers)

###

KNOW THE RISK

Women of childbearing age should be especially aware of a new disease called Zika (ZEE-kah).

Zika is a disease spread by

- » Bite of an infected mosquito
- » Infected woman to child during pregnancy
- » Infected male to partner during sex

If you are pregnant when or soon after you contract Zika, your unborn baby may develop a severe birth defect known as *microcephaly* (my-kroh-SEF-uh-lee).

Microcephaly causes an unusually small head, brain damage, and often death.



UNBORN BABIES ARE AT RISK

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Pregnant woman photos: Sara Neff
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ZIKA

PRECAUTIONS FOR WOMEN





PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR UNBORN BABY

Keep mosquitoes away—the best defense against Zika.

Stay away from areas infested with Zika:

- » Central America
- » South America
- » Parts of the South Pacific

Do not have sex with a recent male visitor to a Zika-infested area or, use condoms for 6 months after his exposure.



■ Reported active transmissions

RECOGNIZE SYMPTOMS OF ZIKA INFECTIONS

Unlike West Nile virus, Zika rarely causes serious illness or death.

Four of five people who get Zika virus won't even know they are sick.

If you are pregnant and contract Zika, you do not have to feel sick to pass the virus to your unborn baby.

Contact your doctor if you have:

- » Fever
- » Joint pain
- » Red, itchy eyes
- » Rash

Symptoms typically occur 2–7 days after a bite from an infected mosquito.

4 WAYS TO KEEP MOSQUITOES AWAY

1

Drain or dump standing water around your home: clean out leaf-filled gutters; dump bird baths and flower pot drain dishes; screen rain barrels and cisterns.

2

Dress to discourage mosquito bites. Wear long pants and long-sleeve shirts. Fabrics with tight weave usually work better than knits or other loosely woven materials.

3

Day, dusk and dark. Mosquitoes that carry Zika are active anytime of the day or night. These mosquitoes can bite anytime the temperature rises above 55°F.

4

DEET mosquito repellent is your best defense if you must be outdoors when mosquitoes are active.